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Working Paper #563

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TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER TRANSITIONS [1]

April 1979

Working Paper #563

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Summary

Effects of increasingly prevalent job and profession changing and reevaluation of work/family priorities have led to a growing interest in "careers" issues. However, aides to understanding and managing the career transition phenomena have not yet been developed. Toward that end, varieties of career transitions are identified here, and commonalities across transitions are explored.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER TRANSITIONS

In the past 50 years, the norm of holding one job or remaining with one work organization for life has given way to a pattern of periodic job changing (Warner & Abegglen, 1955; Jennings, 1970). Recently Driver (in press) has noted a trend toward serial professions, individuals periodically changing professions. The growing proportion of job and profession changers places greater demand on the recruiting, training and other human resource development programs of organizations that individuals leave and join (Gaudet, 1960; Tuchi & Carr, 1971). Among the outcomes for job changers is significant stress for the individuals and their families (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). And the prognosis is that job and profession changing will continue to increase, at least through the year 2000 (Evered, 1979).

Several societal trends have supported and contributed to the increasing acceptance and prevalence of these and other types of career transitions. Included are: (1) a broader concern with overall quality of life versus more traditional narrow definitions of professional success (Yankelovich, 1974; Ondrack, 1973; Astin & Bisconti, 1972); (2) an increased emphasis in the 1960s and 1970s on personal growth and fulfillment, experimentation and individualism (Hall, 1971); (3) a re-examination of work/family priorities (Fogarty et al., 1971); (4) growing concern with the viability of the dual career family (Levinson et al., 1974; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976); (5) earlier retirement and longer life span after retirement (Atchley, 1976; Clark, 1966); and (6) recent reevaluation of societal values (e.g., questioning the desirability of economic growth and bigness (Meadows, 1972; Schumacher, 1973).

As a result, it has become increasingly important for individuals and organizations to understand and to facilitate career transitions. While some studies have been done on particular types of transitions (e.g., retirement, midlife crisis, entering a first job), there has been little attention to developing understandings of the more generic phenomenon of the career transition.

What is a career transition? What are the common features of a career transition? What are various types of career transitions? And how do transitioners cope with their experiences? These four questions are addressed here in an effort to develop understandings which could be used to help organizations and individuals facilitate career transitions.

In the first section, working definitions and common features are discussed. In the second section, types of career transitions are described and illustrated. In the third section, a framework for understanding how individuals cope with transition experiences is presented, after which the perspective is briefly summarized.

DEFINITIONS AND COMMON FEATURES

Definitions

As a preliminary step in understanding transitioners' experiences, the terms career and career transition (CT) are briefly defined and illustrated. There are undoubtedly almost as many ways of answering the question, "what is a career?" as there are individuals willing to address the question. As used here, the term career refers to an accumulation of role-related experiences over time (Hall, 1976, p. 1-4). In addition, four trends in the literature on careers are reflected in

our usage of the term. Traditionally, only occupational or work-related roles were considered careers, especially the roles of professionals (e.g., lawyers, doctors) and managers. However, the concept of career has been recently expanded to include work roles in general (e.g., secretary, farmer), and non-work life roles (e.g., housewife, peace-corp volunteer). Secondly, it has been suggested that meaningful study of work careers must examine "the person within the total life space and throughout his lifetime" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977, p. 46). Issues at the interface of work, family, and leisure roles are now considered crucial for understanding career dynamics (Bailyn & Schein, 1976).

Thirdly, past views focused exclusively on external or objective aspects of careers; that is, on the normal sequence of advancements through a particular occupation (e.g., medicine) or an organizational hierarchy (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). However, there is growing recognition of the need to also consider internal (to the individual) or subjective aspects of careers, including the individual's changing attitudes and values, needs and aspirations, self-assessments and self-concept in relation to the role in question (Hall, 1976; Hughes, 1958; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977).

And fourthly, newer perspectives no longer consider upward progression through an organizational or professional hierarchy an essential element of a career. In fact the traditional concept of a career as a hierarchical progression (i.e., a linear career (Driver, in press)) has been supplemented with other concepts of careers including the steady state career, in which the individual continues to acquire skills within a single field without upward movement, and the spiral career, suggesting a succession of movements through related or even quite different fields

(Driver, in press). (For reviews of career definitions, concepts, and research see: Dalton, 1970; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977.)

To recap, we will consider a career to be a sequence of role-related experiences accumulated over time; it may refer to a work or non-work related role; it encompasses objective and subjective elements; it does not necessarily imply hierarchical or other progression through an organization or other professional structure; and any one career is viewed within a framework of several potentially overlapping and interacting life roles. While our definition of career specifically includes non-work roles, for discussion purposes our focus is on work roles.

What, then, is a career transition? The term transition suggests both a change and a period during which the change is taking place. The central idea in the previous discussion of "career" was "role" (i.e., the task and other behaviors associated with a position in an organization or social system). And, since both subjective or experienced aspects, and objective or observable aspects of careers are important, we define a career transition as the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on a different role) or changing his/her orientation to a role already held.

The duration of the period of transition depends in large part upon the extent of difference the changer experiences between new and old roles or new and old role orientations; generally it takes longer to make the transition to an entirely different or foreign role or situation than to one that is fairly familiar. The transition period is analogous to the encounter period in organizational socialization (Schein, 1968), during which reality testing by the newcomer and mutual adaptation

of individual and organizational unit occur. Encounter extends from the time of entry into the new situation, or role, until substantial adjustment to and acceptance of the situation is reached by the individual.

Common Features

What features characterize the experience of an individual undertaking a CT? It is proposed here that: 1) during CTs individuals are faced with a variety of differences between old and new roles, role orientations, and role settings; 2) the more elements that are different in the new role, or situation, and the more different they are from previous roles, the more the transitioner potentially has to cope with (regardless of the extent to which differences were anticipated and/or are seen as desirable by the transitioner); 3) the type of transition undertaken is a rough indicator of the nature and magnitude of differences to be coped with; 4) there is a general coping process by which individuals manage or respond to differences experienced during transitions of all types, and 5) an understanding of the coping process can be used to facilitate individuals in transition.

Three categories of transition differences have been distinguished: changes, contrasts, and surprises (Louis, 1979). The first category of differences includes changes in objective role features; they are publicly noticeable and knowable, and are often knowable in advance (e.g., at the time the transitioner accepts a new position). Examples include differences between new and old roles in title, office address, salary, and co-workers.

The second category of differences refers to aspects of the new role (or role orientation) that are personally, rather than publicly noticed. These differences, known as contrasts, are perceptual products of experiences in a setting and/or role (i.e., features identified as figure against background of a total field). Contrasts result from differences between new and old settings and from characteristics of the new setting. They represent the individual's definition or map of the new setting and are person-specific rather than indigenous to the organizational transition, as were the objective changes described above. Whether a particular feature of the new situation stands out, or emerges as a contrast, depends in part on its relative importance to the individual transitioner. For two people undergoing the same objective changes in role (e.g., leaving the Stanford MBA program and entering Merrill Lynch), different contrasts will emerge. For these reasons contrasts, unlike objective changes, are not generally knowable in advance.

The third category, surprise, represents both a set of differences and the transitioner's affective reactions to the differences. Surprise encompasses the transitioner's reactions to contrasts and changes, and therefore constitutes the major transition element with which the individual actually copes. Surprises may be positive or negative; they arise from differences between anticipations the transitioner develops (consciously or unconsciously) before the move and actual experiences once in the new role. Surprise may result from either undermet or overmet anticipations about either the job, organization or self. While traditional views of organizational entry and turnover have focused

exclusively on unmet conscious job expectations, it has been proposed elsewhere (Louis, 1978) that it is centrally important to appreciate effects of other types of surprise attendant to career transitions in order to understand and manage transition processes.

A TYPOLOGY OF CAREER TRANSITIONS

In this section a typology or catalog of types of CTs is presented. Why develop a typology of career transitions? Of what benefit might it be? A typology of career transitions offers several potential practical and theoretical benefits. Systematic enumeration of types of CTs could be used to anticipate, analyze, and facilitate the experiences of individual transitioners. A typology of CTs could also provide a framework for integrating and generalizing from relevant research not previously linked to the careers literature; it could as well aid in detecting theoretical and empirical gaps in knowledge and identifying needed areas of study. Additionally, a typology is a potentially useful educational tool for disseminating the growing body of knowledge concerning CTs to individuals and to organizations.

The typology presented here, and still under development, has been derived from an analysis of case descriptions and a review of related typologies (see, for example, Parnes' (1954) seven types of labor mobility and Price's discussion of types and concepts of turnover (1977)). It differs substantially from earlier typologies in its broadened perspective on the nature of career transitions. It is hoped that the typology will both guide and be refined by future research.

From our definition of CT as the period during which an individual is taking on a different role or is altering his/her internal orientation to a role already held, we can identify two major categories of transitions: between role or interrole transitions and within role or intrarole transitions. In the former, a new and different role is actually taken; in the latter, a new and different orientation to an old role is taken. Five types of interrole transitions and four types of intrarole transitions have been included to date in the typology; each is identified and briefly illustrated here.

Interrole Transitions

Individuals undertake interrole transitions when they: 1) enter or reenter a labor pool; 2) take on a different role within the same organization; 3) move from one organization to another; 4) change professions; 5) or exit a labor pool. The interrole transitions are discussed in the rough chronological sequence in which they usually occur.

When an individual enters or reenters the labor pool, there is a change of roles, or an entry transition. The college graduate entering a work organization for the first time as a regular full-time permanent employee and the housewife returning to work after raising children are illustrations of this type of transition. A non-work role example is that of a person marrying for the first time; the individual is taking on a spouse role, a role not previously held.

In entry transitions in which the new role is embedded in an organizational context, several tasks commonly face the transitioner. The individual negotiating the transition must: 1) accept the reality of

the organization; 2) deal with resistance to change; 3) learn how to work, and cope with too much or too little organization, and too much or too little job definition; 4) deal with the boss and the reward system; 5) locate one's place in the organization and develop an identity (Schein, 1978: 94-101).

The move from school to work is an entry transition receiving substantial attention recently. In this transition, a variety of role related elements differ between the new (work) and old (school) roles, including: the presence and type of supervision and feedback, challenge and autonomy, accountability, task structure, discretion over time, dress, physical setting, status, salary, and role identity (Kotter, Faux & McArthur, 1978). Most writers on the subject have concluded that more and better preparation of individuals for the non-technical aspects of the job and the transition process itself is needed.

A second type of interrole transition involves a change of role within the same company, an intracompany transition. For instance, in moving from one department or division to another, co-workers, tasks, technologies, physical setting, and formal and informal procedures are likely to differ. Even when shifting from a technical role to a managerial role within the same department, responsibilities, authority and reporting relationships, information needs and availability, and work space usually change.

A move from one company to another represents an intercompany transition. In such a transition, the number and extent of role elements altered, and therefore the magnitude of differences the transitioner must cope with, depends on similarity between new and old task

requirements, work group and organizational climate, and industry. All of the possible differences associated with an intracompany transition apply here as well. As traditionally used, labor turnover generally refers to voluntary intercompany transitions (Price, 1977).

The fourth type of interrole transition is change in profession, labeled interprofession transition. CTs of this type occur for example when: 1) a dentist takes up law and becomes a practicing attorney; 2) a corporate employee leaves to become an entrepreneur in his/her own business; 3) a businessman leaves the business world and becomes a government official or an academic; 4) a 30 year old military officer retires and takes up a business profession. A brief but rich account of an interprofession transition experience is provided by Michael Blumenthal (1979) in his description of differences he experienced and the culture shock produced in moving from Chairman and chief executive officer of the Bendix Corporation to Secretary of the Treasury.

In essence each profession change entails a move to a different, or as Blumenthal says, a foreign culture. The interprofession transitioner is likely to encounter a variety of differences, and potential surprises. Often associated with a profession change are differences in language used, norms governing interpersonal interactions (e.g., different relationship norms for lawyer-client, dentist-patient, businessman-customer, professor-student relations), code of ethics, reference group, professional self-identity, and societal response to professional identity.

A final type of interrole CT is an exit transition. Four kinds of exits have been distinguished. They vary in permanence or duration,

and in type and source of initiation. A leave of absence (e.g., sabbatical, pregnancy leave, or travel leave) represents a brief, planned exit, usually of a prespecified and finite duration (2 to 12 months). A withdrawal represents a long-term or semi-permanent leave usually initiated by the transitioner and often of an indeterminate duration. The stereotypic case is that of a woman who terminates a work role while raising children. A third kind of exit transition is involuntary unemployment, which by definition represents a company-initiated termination of the individual. It is often unanticipated and necessarily unplanned by the possibly unwilling transitioner. At the outset, the duration of the unemployment period may be difficult or impossible to forecast. And fourth, retirement represents a permanent exit from a particular role. It is usually planned by the transitioner, although early retirement may be company initiated and unanticipated by the individual. (For reviews of the sociological and psychological aspects of retirement see Atchley, 1976; and Friedman and Havighurst, 1954.)

In planned exits (generally all except involuntary unemployment) the transitioner usually has the opportunity to select or construct a role to immediately replace the role being left. Whether or not a new role is entered, and the characteristics of any new organizational context are important determinants of the transitioner's post-exit experience. In most exit transitions the individual leaves (even if only on a temporary leave of absence) a familiar and meaning-giving organizational culture and role context. In many exits, the transitioner does not then enter a different ongoing organization with a well developed

organizational culture. A CT in which an individual leaves and does not replace a membership role entails a special set of differences associated with organizational membership. For example, organizational membership may have provided the individual with regular social interaction, a sense of purpose, a place to be, a time structure, and at a basic level, a reason for getting up in the morning (whether it be to make a contribution or avoid a "dock in pay" for tardiness or absenteeism) (Friedman & Havighurst, 1954; Sofer, 1970; Super, 1957). As research has shown, physiological deterioration, psychological depression, and even death have been associated with withdrawals and retirements (Clark, 1966).

In sum, each of the five types of interrole transition carries with it a variety of possible differences between new and old roles (differences which may be publicly or privately knowable, anticipatable and not anticipatable). These differences may potentially be experienced as surprises, with which the transitioner must then cope.

One final set of differences attendant to many interrole transitions is the passage across different kinds of organizational boundaries, as described by Schein (1971). He has identified functional, hierarchical, and inclusionary boundaries, and notes that in entering a work organization, a recent college graduate crosses all three, taking on a set of tasks within a functional area (e.g., marketing, finance), acquiring a position in the hierarchy (e.g., middle management), and locating oneself in the organization's information and influence network (usually at a peripheral rather than a central position for newcomers). Most interrole transitions involve passage across some or all of the boundaries;

at a minimum, one's place in the inclusionary system is typically in flux during transition. Before examining how individuals cope with differences and resulting surprises, the variety of intrarole CTs are described.

Intrarole Transitions

An intrarole transition represents a change in the individual's relation or internal orientation to a role already held. The intrarole transition often differs from interrole transitions in an important way. While it is difficult to embark on an interrole transition without consciously being aware of doing so, as will be seen some intrarole transitions may be undertaken without the conscious awareness of the individual. The four types of intrarole transitions identified to date are: 1) intrarole adjustment; 2) extrarole adjustment; 3) role/career stage transition; 4) life stage transition.

An intrarole adjustment represents adjustment in orientation to a role in response to experiences in the same role. For instance, Schein (1978) has documented this type of transition among MBA graduates in new work roles, illustrating how complacency can replace enthusiasm and commitment as recruits encounter the realities of corporate life. The MBAs are responding to differences between their actual and anticipated experiences in the role. In role on-the-job experiences have led them to reconsider and adjust their orientations to the same roles. The formal role itself is not changed as a result of an intrarole adjustment; instead, the transition is an internal change in the role holder's orientation to the role.

Another example shows a more positive instance of intrarole adjustment. Dramatic changes in group productivity and interpersonal climate resulted from a change in supervisory personnel. In a research laboratory at a large midwest university the senior professor's style was characterized as authoritarian and dogmatic (e.g., he prohibited conversation in the lab during working hours, forbade exchanging information with researchers from other labs). When he went on sabbatical and a new professor with a more open style was running the lab, both productivity and personal commitment increased; several people reported experiencing the lab as a fun and exciting place to be. The increase in personal commitment represents an intrarole adjustment resulting from reflections on experiences in the role. In the example there was a change in an important aspect of the role, supervision, which precipitated changes in other role elements, such as social and task related interactions. Often such intrarole adjustments are unanticipated by the individual who may not be consciously aware of having altered a role orientation.

A second type of intrarole transition reflects the potential interaction and interdependence of an individual's multiple life roles. In extrarole adjustments, a change in one life role (e.g., a family role) leads to an adjustment in orientation to another role (e.g., work role). The addition of a new non-work role, or a shift in the demands of a non-work role already held, may impinge on a work role, for instance, in several ways. When a professor accepts an editorship role for a scholarly journal, it is likely that the new role will require the professor to adjust (downward) the time and energy given

to other major roles; there may be less time for students, research, family; it may also be that in the long run the new role enriches other roles. Similarly when a junior executive's wife, who also holds a work role, has her first baby, both adults take on new roles as parents which may lead them to devote less time, energy, and (at least temporarily) commitment to their work roles. Here again the transition in role orientation may occur predominately at an unconscious level.

The situation of marital difficulties illustrates adjustments to a work role resulting from experiences in simultaneously held roles. An individual may redefine a work role as more central and pour more energy into tasks at work to avoid dealing with difficulties at home. Alternatively, problems at home may distract the individual's attention and energies away from the work role. Extrarole adjustments reflect differences in the relative importance of one role in relation to other roles. The potential impact of interactions among roles underscores the importance of considering the total lifespace of the individual in understanding career dynamics and transitions (Lewin, 1951; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1978; Bailyn & Schein, 1976).

A third type of intrarole transition is represented by a transition in role/career stage. Much work has been done identifying the general stages through which an individual typically passes during an organizational career (Super, 1957; Miller & Form, 1951; Hall & Nougaim, 1968; Schein, 1978). A transition of this type represents a normal progression through a sequence of stages in the total career

cycle. While they may be anticipatable, or planable, they often occur without the individual's conscious effort or even awareness. In this respect they differ from the first two types of intrarole transition, which usually represented responses to unplanned and often unanticipatable experiences in work or other roles.

Different issues, personal needs, and organizational opportunities are associated with different career stages. For example, in the typical transition between early and mid career, the individual moves albeit gradually, from a peripheral to a central role in the informal network of the organization (Schein, 1971); and in the transition from mid to late career, the individual shifts from having a mentor or sponsor to being one (Schein, 1978; Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977).

Although role title, responsibilities and tasks may change in a career stage transition as they did in an intracompany transition, the career stage transition is distinct in three respects: 1) it represents a major passage through the career cycle, versus a more minor though official change of role and duties; 2) the formal organizational role need not formally change to mark the stage passage; 3) the changes are more diffuse, pervasive, gradual, and less conscious.

Each career stage implicitly conveys an image of the expected or normal role orientation. (For a more detailed discussion of stages, issues, and role orientations associated with each stage, see Schein, 1978; a comparison of approaches to career stages is found in Hall, 1976.)

A fourth and final type of intrarole transition, labeled <u>life stage transition</u>, is based on passage through normal stages in human development. Erikson's (1959) model of the life cycle suggests a series of

stages in psychosocial development through which an individual passes from infancy to death. As in models of career stages, different issues predominate at different life stages; issues implicitly guide individuals' orientation to their life-space and tasks. While normal psychosocial transitions are expected to parallel and roughly correspond to transitions in career stage, they may separately precipitate reorientations in one's work role orientations. Additionally, certain career stage transitions presuppose adequate transition in psychosocial stages.

Erikson suggests, for instance, that individuals who at adulthood feel they have made a worthwhile and satisfying contribution in their life work, may wish to continue to do so by helping others develop and by taking on more senior guiding responsibilities (generativity). Or at adulthood individuals may feel discouraged, consider that their efforts have been worthless and that it is too late to start over (stagnation). (It appears that the "mid life crisis" (Jaques, 1965) may represent an experience of stagnation.) A sense of stagnation rather than generativity during the adult stage of psychosocial development may result in substantially different orientations to work roles. The advisability of supporting individuals to enter new career stages might well depend in part on their resolution of issues in psychosocial development.

However, it is not altogether a one-way interaction. The events and outcomes associated with individuals' career stage transitions importantly facilitate or hinder their psychosocial development. Organizational roles provide a primary arena in and through which individuals test themselves, work through life issues, fulfill needs for challenge, self-development, interaction, and otherwise construct self-identities.

Table 1 summarizes the varieties of CTs explored here. It is important to note that any particular transition may contain elements from several types of CTs. For example, a shift from a technical to a managerial role could be experienced as simply an intracompany transition or, additionally, as a fairly major interprofession transition; it could also be considered a career stage transition. How a particular transition is to be classified depends upon the specific situation and the individual's experience of the transition, again underscoring the importance of subjective aspects of careers.

Insert Table 1 About Here

It is expected that exploration of the following areas will yield fruitful insights into the nature of the particular transition experience under consideration; further, it is proposed that such insights are important inputs in classifying and in facilitating any career transition. Areas to explore are:

1) differences between pre and post transition roles that constitute the substance of the transition experience with which the transitioner must cope.
2) the current and historical organizational contexts in which the transitioner's roles have been embedded.
3) the transitioner's larger life-space including relationships among extra organizational roles and work roles.
4) the transitioner's present life stage and relevant events from earlier psychosocial development.

5) the transitioner's current career stage, career development history, and the relationship between current career and life stages.

We turn now to an examination of the process by which individuals make sense of their experiences during career transitions.

HOW INDIVIDUALS COPE WITH TRANSITION: SENSE-MAKING

Let us take a closer look at the sense-making process by which individuals cope with transition-generated role differences and the surprises they produce. Recently, a framework describing the processes by which individuals detect and interpret surprises has been developed (Louis, 1978). The framework suggests that sense-making can be viewed as a cycle. The sequence of events over time is as follows: 1) individuals form unconscious and conscious predictions or expectations about future events; 2) individuals experience events which may be discrepant from predictions, experienced as surprises; 3) discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation, or post-diction, through which interpretations of discrepancies are develped; that is, meaning is attributed to surprises; 4) based on attributed meanings, any necessary behavioral responses to the immediate situation are selected; 5) also based on attributed meanings, understandings of actors, actions, and setting are updated and predictions about future experiences in the setting are revised. At that point the cycle has begun again (Louis, 1978). The cycle emphasizes that meaning is attributed to surprise through the sense-making process, rather than arising concurrently with the perception and experience of role differences or surprises.

The framework (Louis, 1978) further suggests that there are four types of input to sense-making: 1) the sense-maker's past experiences with similar surprises and situations; 2) general personal/personality characteristics including predispositions to attribute causality to self, others, fate, etc. (e.g., locus of control (Rotter, 1966)), and orienting purposes (Lewin, 1944); 3) interpretive schemes, or internalizations of context-specific dictionaries of meaning which "...structure routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area" (Berger & Luckman, 1968: 138); 4) interpretations made by others in the situation. Figure 1 summarizes the framework.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

That transitioners have special sense-making needs can be seen by comparing them with insiders not undergoing transitions. There are three important ways in which the experiences of transitioners, particularly interrole transitioners, differ from those of insiders. In the first place, insiders normally know what to expect in and of the situation; little is surprising or needs to be made sense of. Secondly, when surprises do arise (e.g., not getting an expected raise), insiders usually have sufficient history in the setting to interpret them more accurately, or make sense based more on relevant knowledge of the immediate situation. An insider probably knows, for instance, whether the denied raise is due to company-wide budget cuts or is related to his/her performance, and whether it is an indication of how the future may unfold or a temporary situation. Thirdly, when surprises arise and sense-making is necessary, insiders usually have other insiders who can

serve as sounding boards to "check out" their perceptions and interpretations with.

This comparison suggests that two types of input to sense-making may be problematic for transitioners. In the first place, transitioners probably do not have adequate history in the setting to appreciate as fully as do insiders why and how surprises have arisen. As a result, transitioners often attach meanings to actions, events, and surprises in the new setting using interpretation schemes developed in previous roles and settings. Based on these, inappropriate/dysfunctional interpretations may be produced.

Interpretations may err in several ways. Transitioners may attribute permanence or stability to temporary situations, and vice versa (Weiner, 1974). As well, transitioners may see themselves as the source or cause of events when external factors are responsible for outcomes (Weiner).

Such interpretational errors can lead to inappropriate behavioral and attitudinal responses. Weiner and his associates have shown that attributions to stable rather than temporary causes lead more frequently to behavior changes (e.g., the boss is always like this versus he/she is going through a rough, but temporary period). In laboratory experiments shifts in subjects' affect were more likely to result from personal, or internal, attributions than from external attributions (e.g., the boss doesn't like me versus the boss treats everyone harshly). While further work is needed to assess the extent to which Weiner's findings hold in organizational settings, it seems obvious that individuals select responses to events at least in part on the basis of the meaning they

attach to them. Thus the newcomer's lack of appropriate or setting-specific interpretation schemes, or meaning dictionaries, may lead both to surprise itself and to misinterpretation (relative to interpretations based on broad historical knowledge of the situation) of surprise during sense-making.

Secondly, while transitioners probably have not developed relationships with others in the setting with whom they could test their perceptions and interpretations, such reality-testing seems an important input to sense-making. Insiders can serve as sounding boards, guiding newcomers to background information for assigning accurate meaning to events and surprises.

Relationships with insiders can facilitate the transitioner's acquisition of the local meaning dictionary or interpretation scheme. Finally, information may come through insider-transitioner relationships that averts and/or precipitates surprises. Therefore, insiders are seen as a potentially rich source of assistance to transitioners in gaining understanding of their experiences, and of new organizational settings.

The framework presented here suggests that sense made of surprises by transitioners, especially those entering new settings, may be inadequate in the absence of relevant information about organizational, interpersonal, and personal histories provided by others in the setting. Inputs to sense-making from sources in the organization balance the inputs provided by the transitioner (i.e., previous experiences, personality predispositions, interpretive schemes from previous settings)

which are likely to be inadequate in the new setting. Until transitioners develop accurate internal maps of the setting, until they appreciate local meanings, it is important that they have information available for amending internal cognitive maps and for attaching meaning to their experiences in new or altered roles and settings.

CONCLUSION

In considering a career transition to be the period during which an individual is changing roles or changing orientations to a role already held, we have identified nine types of transitions. Differences between new and old roles, role orientations, and settings are experienced by the transitioner as surprises; role differences vary in nature and magnitude depending on the type of transition, and the career and life background of the transitioner. Transition-generated surprises are coped with through the sense-making process. However, the sense-making resources available to the transitioner are often inadequate.

Transitioners need accurate historical and broad contextual information about the setting; they need help in acquiring setting and role specific interpretation schemes; they need relationships with insiders who will serve as sounding boards for reality testing during transition; and they need to realize and take action to fill these needs.

By integrating knowledge and research about the various types of career transitions, and by studying the processes by which individuals

cope with transition experiences, greater understanding of career transitions can be developed and the transition process can be facilitated.

FOOTNOTE

[1]I would like to thank Roger Evered and Bob Smith for their encouragement and help in writing this paper.

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Table 1. Varieties of Career Transitions

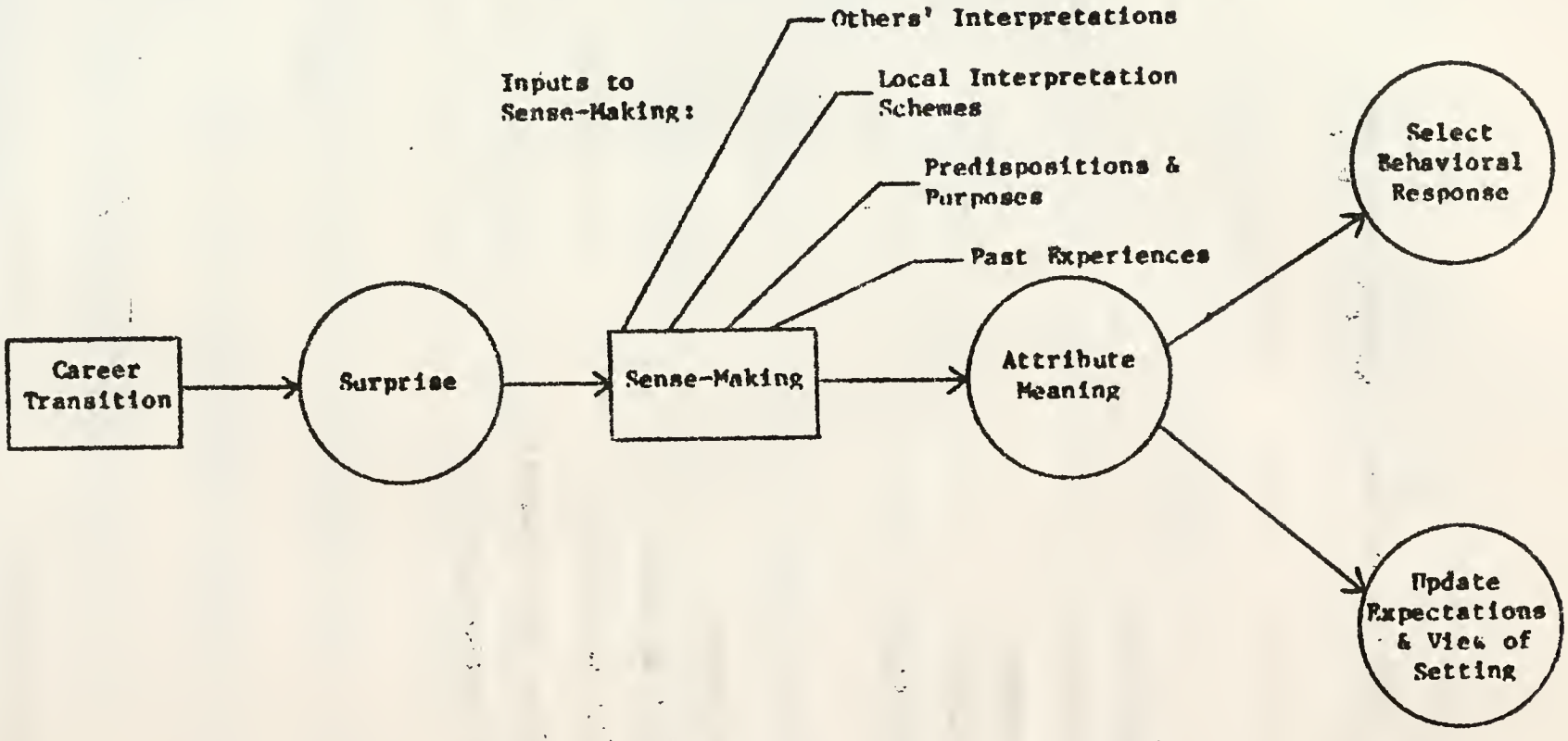
INTERROLE TRANSITIONS

1. Entry/Reentry
2. Intracompany
3. Intercompany
4. Interprofession
5. Exit

INTRAROLE TRANSITIONS

1. Intrarole Adjustment
2. Extrarole Adjustment
3. Role/Career Stage Transition
4. Life Stage Transition

FIGURE 1. Sense-Making in Newcomers' Transitions



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